An Education Agenda:

Kindergarten To Senior 4

Discussion Paper

March 2001

Manitoba
Education,
Training
and Youth

INTRODUCTION

Success for all learners is a vital goal of Manitoba's educational system. Effective learning opportunities and successful outcomes across Kindergarten to Senior 4 (K–S4) help to support student transitions to work, post-secondary education or community living and enhance students' life prospects. Manitoba Education, Training and Youth wishes to have a school system that fosters high outcomes for all learners, that is based on collaboration among partners, that is closely connected to the community and that itself reflects the principles of a learning society. We value innovation, evaluation, accountability, openness, responsiveness, partnership, consultation, and research.

Learning takes place in a variety of settings. Schools, of course, are important settings, but so are homes, day cares, the workplace, and the community. It is well recognized that parents, students, educators, educational and community organizations, employers and government need to share responsibility for developing and supporting an educational system that ensures success for all students.

Achieving success for all learners is a complex endeavor that poses multiple challenges and dilemmas, and embodies difficult choices for administrators and educators. Across the educational community and throughout the education literature, what constitutes successful learning and practice is not always a matter of easy agreement. For example, different individuals and organizations with commitment to public education can apply different values, beliefs and criteria to defining and judging successful learning outcomes. Acknowledging the different perspectives education partners bring to policy development and implementation is of primary importance to achieving shared responsibility and ownership of our education system.

Manitoba Education, Training and Youth has identified six priority areas to be addressed over the next three years. Significant action within each of these areas can improve

outcomes for students, families, and communities. This paper outlines those priority areas and is meant to serve as the basis for a dialogue on what actions need to be taken over the next three years. The Department hopes the dialogue will build on the current exemplary work of educators, parents, students, and communities across the province. Also, it is expected that the dialogue will provide partners with opportunities to reflect and understand each other's beliefs, aspirations, assumptions, and preferences and set appropriate expectation, roles, and responsibilities.

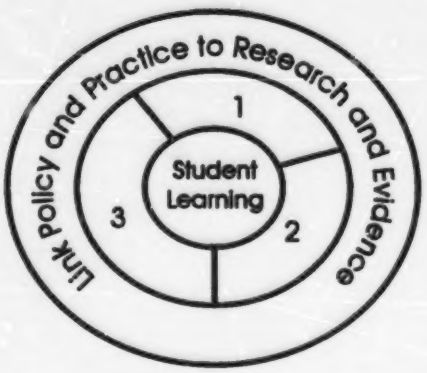
The Department has organized, in the spring of 2001, several regional consultation sessions to identify specific actions within the six priority areas that would ensure successful learning outcomes for all Manitoba's students. The content of this paper will be discussed at these sessions and the information collected will contribute to Department, division/district and school planning processes.

THE PRIORITY AREAS

Over the next three years, the Department proposes to concentrate its energies and resources on six key priority areas. These priorities are based on research, have the potential to make a significant difference in outcomes for students, families, and communities, are consistent with the Department's overall goals, and embody a collaborative process with educational partners. The priorites are:

1. Improving outcomes for less successful learners.
2. Strengthening links among schools, parents and communities.
3. Strengthening school planning and reporting.
4. Improving learning opportunities for educators.
5. Strengthening pathways among secondary schools, post-secondary education and work.
6. Linking policy and practice to research and evidence.

The following illustration depicts how the Department proposes to focus on success for all learners.



1. **School**
   - *improve outcomes for less successful learners*
   - *strengthen school planning and reporting*
   - *improve learning opportunities for educators*
2. **Family and Community**
   - *strengthen links among schools, parents, and communities*
3. **Workplace and Post-secondary Institutions**
   - *strengthen pathways among secondary schools, post-secondary education and work*

1. Improving Outcomes for Less Successful Learners

Less successful learners face a lifetime of educational, social, and economic marginalization or exclusion. Their lack of success in schools often means that they lack the skills needed to secure training or employment. As a result, the costs to the individual and society can be significant.

Manitoba Education, Training and Youth has focused attention on student learning by developing curricula that provide effective instructional strategies and assessment approaches, and by providing funding and specialist support for targeted programs such as early literacy intervention. The Department has also developed an Aboriginal Education and Training framework, implemented initial recommendations of *The Manitoba Special Education Review — Final Report*, and introduced a Grade 3 Assessment policy. All of these initiatives are intended to respond to the diversity of students in our schools, with particular emphasis on developing approaches and interventions that address less successful students.

School divisions/districts and schools have introduced early literacy planning, early childhood programs (*e.g.*, nursery programs, early childhood centres, speech/language programs), innovative approaches for students at risk, and whole-school improvement programs. Additionally, the Faculties of Education have developed programs to prepare teachers to work with inner city and Aboriginal children and youth in schools.

Despite these efforts, educators throughout Manitoba have indicated that public schools are still encountering a considerable number of students who are struggling to meet the provincial learning outcomes. Schools and divisions/districts have also expressed concern about the number of students entering Senior 1 with below grade levels in literacy and numeracy.

The Department has identified improving outcomes for less successful learners as a priority. In order to do so, the Department calls for collaboration with administrators, educators, parents, community members, and other government departments to gather information about the struggling learner and to develop and monitor approaches that enhance opportunities for success.

Over the next three years, Manitoba Education, Training and Youth proposes to work with its partners to identify where student results are weak (*e.g.*, students entering school with poor literacy skills, students experiencing learning difficulties when they move from middle to senior years, *etc.*). Schools are being asked to identify areas of concern in their annual school plans, and to articulate strategies to facilitate improvement (*e.g.*, curriculum, instruction, assessment, professional development, relationships with families and communities, *etc.*).

The Department acknowledges that teachers and administrators need to be provided with enhanced professional learning opportunities that focus on assisting less successful students. Issues that need to be addressed include adapting instructional approaches to better meet the needs of divergent learners, recognizing and diagnosing learning problems, identifying and using resources to solve student learning problems, and enhancing student motivation, school climate, and school leadership. The Department proposes to focus its support on professional learning opportunities that target schools with high concentrations of less successful learners.

2. Strengthening Links among Schools, Parents and Communities

Parents are children's first teachers, and as such set the foundation from which children approach and continue to learn. Throughout a child's schooling and life in general, parental involvement has been shown to be an essential component to facilitate success. Additionally, communities contribute to the child's physical, social, emotional, spiritual, and cognitive well-being, all of which are important features for healthy growth. Collaboration among families, the school, and the community serves to improve the learning successes of all students.

Manitoba Education, Training and Youth actively supports parent and community involvement. The Department provides learning opportunities for parents, including Aboriginal parents, through parental involvement workshops, information sessions on Kindergarten to Senior 4 school programs and achievement levels, and parent reports on core subject areas that identify how parents can support their children's learning. The Department also funds the Manitoba Association of Parent Councils, maintains links with various community agencies to support pre-school children and students with special needs, and encourages community use of schools.

School divisions/districts and schools have numerous successful parental and community involvement initiatives. These programs provide families with information and support in parenting, health and learning needs of pre-school children, and referral assistance. School divisions/districts and schools have involved parents and the community in the school planning process, offered workshops (*e.g.*, adult literacy, nutrition, curriculum, child development, health care, study skills) and have established drop-in centres and adolescent parent programs.

While efforts to involve parents and the community have increased significantly, school divisions/districts, schools, and parents are seeking more and different ways to increase parental and community involvement.

To strengthen links between schools, parents, and communities, the Department supports a number of initiatives. Of paramount importance, communication among all participants needs to be strengthened, educators need to welcome and involve families and communities within their schools, and Aboriginal community linkages and partnerships need to be established and strengthened.

Over the next three years, the Department proposes to work with school divisions/districts and schools to pilot and examine community school models. Existing governance structures will also be examined to determine if they encourage and support parental and community involvement. Investigation will be initiated into how educators and school boards can facilitate appropriate community involvement that meets the interests, needs, and concerns of families and draws upon the strengths and opportunities families can offer to the education system.

The Department proposes that schools and the Department provide families and communities with continual information about policies, curricula, outcomes, and standards, in both print and electronic formats.

3. Strengthening School Planning and Reporting

Schools are most successful when they have meaningful and clearly stated goals, and a process for monitoring and reporting on the progress being made towards the achievement of these goals. Teachers, students, families, and communities must participate in this process if it is to succeed.

Since 1996, Manitoba Education, Training and Youth has encouraged school staff, parents, students, and community members to prepare annual school plans. To assist in this process, the Department has provided support materials and learning opportunities for educators and parents. As a result, numerous schools and school divisions/districts have established a variety of successful planning processes. Some divisions/districts and schools have developed a school review process based on their school plan, used various methods to involve parents and community members in their planning process (*e.g.*, focus groups), and developed school reports or school profiles that are available in various formats, including the Internet.

Comments from schools who have piloted the school planning process indicate that there is a need for all partners to continue this support and to improve the linkage between school, division/district, and department planning. The Provincial Auditor has also stated that the province's long-term educational goals need to be clearly stated, understood, and harmonized with school and division/district objectives.

The Department has identified school planning and reporting as a priority. In the next three years, Manitoba Education, Training and Youth will work with its partners to support schools and school divisions/districts to identify methods of effective planning, data collection, and evaluation. This will allow partners to identify concerns and issues that require attention and to monitor and report on their success in addressing these issues. The Department will work with its partners to assess the information it collects and will provide schools and divisions/districts with the information needed to

plan effectively. A set of outcome indicators will be developed that can be used by the partners to assess their contributions to the success of all learners. The Department also proposes to pilot a school review process that will be linked to school planning for the purpose of assessing effectiveness and guiding improvement.

The Department, school divisions/districts, and schools can only succeed if they have the support of the communities they serve. Manitoba Education, Training and Youth will work with educational partners to develop local and province-wide reporting mechanisms that will enable the public to evaluate the performance of the educational system. Emphasis will be placed on ensuring that these communication processes and the information content will be clear, understandable, and relevant to parent and community expectations.

4. Improving Learning Opportunities for Educators

Teachers have an enormous impact on how well students learn. With each passing year, however, educators are being asked to deal with an increasing number of issues, ranging from student diversity, new curricula, new instructional and assessment methods, to keeping up-to-date on new information technologies.

One-day presentations and workshops have a limited ability in assisting educators in developing teaching practices that improve the learning of all students. Research related to effective schooling has shown that sustained collaborative contact, feedback, coaching, and discussion is required. Since improvement in teaching is a collective enterprise, responsibility for change lies both within the school as well as with each individual teacher.

Manitoba Education, Training and Youth has provided professional learning opportunities and financial support for Manitoba educators, as well as increased funding for professional development. Professional learning opportunities

have been provided on curriculum implementation, best practice instruction and assessment, information technology integration, standards testing and evaluation, Aboriginal education, educational leadership, and programming for students with special needs. The Department has also collaborated with the Faculties of Education, Manitoba First Nations Education Resource Centre, Manitoba Council for Leadership in Education, Manitoba Association of Parent Councils, regional superintendent/principal groups and education councils to design and provide professional learning opportunities. An Event Calendar has been established on the Department's website to share stakeholders' professional learning events.

School divisions/districts, Faculties of Education and partner organizations have provided educators with numerous learning opportunities to develop their skills and knowledge. Schools and divisions/districts have developed professional development plans, and sponsored summer institutes, continuing education opportunities, study groups, and websites to promote ongoing dialogue about learning and education. School staff development programs address areas of concern such as improving learning outcomes for struggling learners. Faculties of Education offer in-school courses for teachers-in-training as well as for practicing teachers. The Faculties have also partnered with the Department, Manitoba Teachers' Society, school administrators, and various organizations to develop curricula in a variety of subject areas: English language arts, Science, Français langue première, Français langue seconde-immersion, Basic French as well as in the area of educational technology and multi-media, and preventing school drop-outs.

Teachers have informed the Department, however, that they need enhanced supports and preparation time to better comprehend and implement differentiated instructional strategies, authentic assessment, and information technology. Superintendents and principals, on the other hand, have

identified the need to develop leadership programs for potential school administrators. The Department is committed to working with its partners to improve learning opportunities for educators. In conjunction with school divisions/districts, partner organizations, and the Faculties of Education, the Department proposes to integrate professional learning for practicing teachers with teachers-in-training in order to build leadership skills for all educators. Support for professional learning will be expanded to a three-year cycle as changes in practice and new initiatives are introduced. The Department also proposes to develop methods of providing teachers with professional learning opportunities that allow and encourage them to continually refine their skills and knowledge.

5. Strengthening Pathways among Secondary Schools, Post-secondary Education and Work

As young people combine work and study, the transition from secondary school to post-secondary education and work has become increasingly complex. This transition is especially difficult for certain groups of youth, especially those with limited education, skills, and experience, and for Aboriginal youth. As lifelong learning becomes more important, increasing numbers of learners will have to move in and out of formal education and training systems, shift between full- and part-time learning and employment, and assume greater choice and flexibility in learning arrangements.

Manitoba Education, Training and Youth supports partnership arrangements that provide learners with relevant learning experiences and exposure to future career possibilities. A number of products, services, and programs (*e.g.*, Blueprint for Life/Work Design, and Real Game) prepare students for the school to work transition. Colleges, universities, business, and industry are involved on curriculum teams and advisory committees to ensure curricula prepare students for post-secondary studies and work. The Department also supports positive workplace experiences and development of culturally appropriate career awareness information for Aboriginal youth. The Department works with

interdepartmental/interagency groups and post-secondary personnel to ensure that young people, including those with disabilities, have access to post-secondary institutions, work environments, specialized community programs, and adult services.

School divisions/districts and secondary schools have worked with partners in the community and post-secondary institutions to strengthen transition pathways. Programming that provides career advice, work experience, and cooperative education has been implemented. Schools have clustered courses in vocational education (*e.g.*, electronic and environmental management) and offered specific programs (*e.g.*, industrial technician) that provide on-the-job training. Schools have also worked with community colleges to provide students with a combination of senior years and college education to prepare them for either college or the workplace. Additionally, the private sector has provided direct support to schools (*e.g.*, Asper Centre for Entrepreneurship has sponsored courses and resources that are made available to schools).

Secondary school principals and superintendents have highlighted the need to strengthen pathways between secondary schools, post-secondary education and work. They have called for increased opportunities for apprenticeship, internship, and other forms of work experience, as well as greater course articulation and coordination with colleges and universities.

Manitoba Education, Training and Youth plans to collaborate more with its partners in order to strengthen the connections between schools, post-secondary institutions, and the workplace. It supports improved articulation and joint programming across the education sectors. The Department also supports an inquiry into the feasibility of developing a curricula common for both secondary schools and post-secondary institutions, dual post-secondary and senior years

credits, and retroactive accreditation. The Department is committed to providing greater opportunities to combine work and study and providing a broader application of prior learning assessment options that recognize learning acquired in settings other than classrooms.

Through a collaborative approach, the Department hopes to articulate the role secondary schools can play to help youth in their transitions to work and post-secondary education, and to examine alternative structures and/or practices that might be desirable for assisting youth in these transitions.

6. Linking Policy and Practice to Research and Evidence

Education policy development and practice needs to be based on research findings and linked to student learning results. Successful policy implementation depends on collaborative efforts among delivery partners in setting goals, collecting data, implementing strategies, monitoring progress, and adjusting actions toward goals.

Often there is not always a clear, commanding body of research and practice to inform policy choices and decisions on educational matters. Nevertheless, there are many situations where a substantial body of knowledge does exist that offers clear implications for policy development and implementation. Strengthening the dissemination and use of that knowledge and the evidence upon which it is based, is vital for the development and implementation of effective policies and practices across the education system.

Manitoba Education, Training and Youth supports research that aims to improve teaching and learning. A variety of programs have been developed and monitored through a research approach. Examples include categorical grant programs (*e.g.*, students at risk, and students experiencing behavioural problems) and the Manitoba Speech-Language Pathology Outcomes Measure. Through the use of forums, reports and the Department's website, information related to

research developments are made available to the education community and the public at large.

The Department continually reviews current research on teaching, learning, and assessment to ensure key developments are reflected in curricula and professional learning opportunities for Manitoba. The recommendations presented in *The Manitoba Special Education Review — Final Report* were based on a structured data collection process and review of the literature. Information (*e.g.*, student assessment results) and research services are provided to teachers, administrators, teachers-in-training, and home schooling parents. Recently, the Department established a Research and Planning Branch to assist in knowledge exchange, data collection and analysis, indicator development, research and evaluation.

Many school divisions/districts, schools, and educational partners have established research departments, initiated action research, and disseminated findings of their research activities. They have piloted and evaluated initiatives such as division-wide assessment programs, students at risk programs, and full-day Kindergarten programs. The Faculties of Education have collaborated with local school divisions, federal and provincial governments, and private industry to conduct research, particularly in relation to educational technology, vocational education, and jobs related to literacy.

The Manitoba Special Education Review — Final Report has underscored the need to link policy and practice to research and evidence. It has recommended that the Department initiate further research into the areas of best practice and systemic evaluation of programs and services. Additionally, partner organizations have requested that research be undertaken into student achievement in the senior years, program and curriculum evaluation, and successful programming in schools with high concentrations of less successful learners.

Over the next three years, the Department intends to strengthen the linkages between policy, practice, research and evidence by improving the use of empirical data and program evaluation as a basis for policy and practice. The Department proposes to work with post-secondary institutions and educational partners to provide educators with access to high quality and current information.

Manitoba Education, Training and Youth is committed to increase research and evaluation activity in the areas of instruction, interventions, special needs, students at risk, parental involvement, professional development, and technology initiatives. Departmental policies and programs will also be evaluated to determine if they are achieving the intended results.